

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 7163

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: IN, US

SUBJECT: INDO-US RELATIONS: SOME IMPROVEMENT

SUMMARY: SINCE THE AMBASSADOR'S FRANK TALK WITH FONMIN CHAVAN, THE INDIANS HAVE BEGUN SMILING MORE. THEY HAVE DONE SOME ACTIVE

COURTING OF VISITING AMERICANS, TONED DOWN (WITH ONE OR TWO EXCEPTIONS) THEIR PUBLIC CRITICISMS OF THE US, SO FAR RESISTED THE TEMPTATION OF USE THE US AS AN ISSUE IN THE HIGHLY CHARGED GUJARAT ELECTION CAMPAIGN, AVOIDED USING US ARMS SUPPLY POLICY AS AN EXCUSE FOR INDO-PAK TALKS ON CIVIL AVIATION REACHING AN IMPASSE LAST WEEK, BEGUN IMPLEMENTING CHAVAN'S STATEMENT TO THE AMBASSADOR ON MOVING AHEAD WITH SUBCOMMISSION WORK AT THE "WORK-ING LEVELS", AND HAVE HINTED THAT CHAVAN WISHES TO TAKE UP THE WORK OF THE JOINT COMMISSION WHEN HE GOES TO NEW YORK IN THE FALL. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS BRIEFED A SUCCESSION OF JOURNALISTS, INDIAN AND AMERICAN, FOCUSING ON THE NEED TO IMPROVE INDO-US RELATIONS, AND THE GENERAL TONE OF PRESS STORIES IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS HAVE CONSEQUENTLY BEEN POSITIVE. IT IS HARD TO AVOID THE CONCLUSION THAT A HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL DECISION HAS BEEN MADE TO TRY TO PUT INDO-US RELATIONS BACK ON THE TRACK AND TO PREPARE FOR A MEETING BETWEEN CHAVAN AND THE SECRETARY WHILE CHAVAN IS AT THE UNGA. END SUMMARY.

1. WE FIND OURSELVES AWASH IN SMALL, BUT CUMULATIVELY SIGNIFICANT, INDICATORS OF INDIAN EFFORTS TO GET RELATIONS WITH THE US ONTO A CALMER PLANE. WE SUMMARIZE BELOW THE KEY ONES:

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A) VISITING NY COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS STAFFER WILLIAM BARNDT, EXPECTING TO SEE ONE OR TWO MIDDLE-LEVEL OFFICIALS, WAS PRESENTED BY THE MINISTRY ON ITS OWN INITIATIVE WITH A SCHEDULE IN MID-MAY WHICH INCLUDED HOUR-LONG CALLS ON THE FOREIGN MINISTER, FOREIGN SECRETARY, CHAIRMAN OF THE POLICY PLANNING COMMITTEE, AND A LUNCH BY THE JOINT SECRETARY (AMERICAS). CHAVAN TOLD BARNDT THAT THE MESSAGE HE WANTED TO CONVEY WAS THAT IT WAS NECESSARY TO GET AN INDO-US DIALOGUE RESTARTED. THE US ARMS DECISION HAD CAUSED A DELAY IN INDO-US DIALOGUE BUT THERE WAS NO REASON TO HALT THE DIALOGUE, MERELY PAUSE. CHAVAN SAID HE PLANNED TO GO TO THE UN IN THE FALL AND WANTED TO GET THE JOINT COMMISSION GOING THEN. IT WAS NOT NECESSARY TO WAIT FOR THAT, HOWEVER, IN ORDER TO GET THE SUBCOMMISSIONS MOVING. HE EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT US "INDIFFERENCE" TO INDIA AND SAID THIS HAD AN EFFECT ON THE PRIDE OF A COUNTRY OF INDIA'S SIZE. CHAVAN OBSERVED THAT WHILE THERE WERE POLITICAL IMPERATIVES WHICH MADE IT NECESSARY FOR INDIA TO SUPPORT THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CONSENSUS AMONG THE LDCS, INDIA WITH ITS GREATER EXPERIENCE WAS ABLE TO BE A "VOICE FOR REALISM." CHAVAN ALSO CAUTIONED BARNDT THAT IN OPEN SOCIETIES LIKE INDIA AND THE US, WHEN DIFFERENCES OF VIEW OR POLICY AROSE, IT WAS NECESSARY TO SPEAK OUT AND THIS SHOULD NOT CAUSE CONCERN.

B) THE INDIAN CHAIRMEN OF THE EDUCATION AND CULTURE (PARTHASARATHY) AND ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL (M.G. KAUL) SUBCOMMISSIONS HAVE SEPARATELY TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS IN THE LAST WEEK THAT THEY HAVE THE GREEN LIGHT TO GET BACK TO WORK ON COOPERATIVE PROGRAMMING WITH THE US AT THE WORKING LEVEL. MEA JOINT SECRETARY (AMERICAS) TEJA AND OTHER FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD US THAT MEA HAS IN FACT TRANSMITTED THIS MESSAGE TO OTHER MINISTRIES.

C) TEJA TOOK THE RARE (FOR HIM) INITIATIVE LAST WEEK OF CALLING IN AP DELHI BUREAU CHIEF MYRON BELKIND TO TALK ABOUT INDO-US RELATIONS. HE TOLD BELKIND THAT "INDIA AND THE US DO MEAN A GREAT DEAL TO EACH OTHER. THEY NEED TO TALK ABOUT INTERNATIONAL ISSUES OF GLOBAL CONCERN, SUCH AS PEACE AND ECONOMIC ORDER. WE SHOULD NOT SHUT OURSELVES OFF FROM EACH OTHER. WE NEED BETTER UNDERSTANDING, MORE TOLERANCE, A CONTINUING DIALOGUE." (BELKIND HAS NOT WRITTEN A STORY YET.)

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D) INDIAN OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN BRIEFING THEIR OWN PRESS IN POSITIVE TERMS, VERY MUCH ALONG THE LINES OF BELKIND'S INTERVIEW AND BARNDT. THE WELL-CONNECTED DELHI CORRESPONDENT OF THE MADRAS HINDU, G.K. REDDY, WROTE MAY 29: "THE PROCESS OF RESTORATION OF A TOLERABLY GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIA AND THE US IS EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED BY THE END OF THIS YEAR." HINDUSTAN TIMES ASST. EDITOR RASHEED TALIB WROTE THE SAME DAY:

CHAVAN "SAID INDIA WAS PREPARED TO LET BYGONES BE BYGONES. IT WAS WILLING TO RECONCILE ITSELF TO THE US DECISION TO LIFT THE EMBARGO ON ARMS SUPPLIES TO PAKISTAN...SO LONG AS THE DELIVERIES THEMSELVES WERE LIMITED AND RESTRAINED." THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS ALSO TOLD SEVERAL REPORTERS THEY WOULD PREFER THAT THE AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH CHAVAN AND ITS CONTENT NOT BE EMPHASIZED (ALTHOUGH REPORTERS ARE AWARE OF ITS GENERAL FLAVOR AND ONE FAR LEFT PAPER HAS PUBLISHED A PRETTY ACCURATE ACCOUNT).

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 7163

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E) OFFICIAL INDIANS HAVE THEMSELVES BEEN MORE RESTRAINED THAN THEY WERE A MONTH AGO IN TALKING ABOUT THE US, DESPITE THE TEMPTATIONS OF A HEATED ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN GUJARAT STATE. MRS. GANDHI HAS NOT ONLY AVOIDED REFERENCES OR EVEN INNUENDOS AIMED AT THE US IN HER PUBLIC SPEECHES BUT ALSO REPORTEDLY BACKED AWAY IN A PRESS INTERVIEW NOT YET PUBLISHED IN FULL FROM HER "THREAT FROM THE SEA" COMMENTS IN APRIL IN TERMS OF ITS IMPLICIT REFERENCE TO THE US. (NEW DELHI 7135) WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT GOVT. OFFICIALS TOLD AT LEAST ONE DELHI EDITOR THE GOI WOULD NOT BE UNHAPPY IF A PRESS STORY THIS WEEK REFERRING TO ALLEGED CIA ACTIVITIES IN INDIA WAS "KILLED." AMBASSADOR T.N. KAUL, ALTHOUGH IN DELHI, HAS KEPT ALMOST ENTIRELY OUT OF PUBLIC VIEW SO FAR. THERE ARE OCCASIONAL EXCEPTIONS TO THIS IMPROVEMENT, HOWEVER. FOR EXAMPLE, THE DEFENSE MINISTER IN A POLITICAL SPEECH IN THE PUNJAB THE OTHER DAY REPORTEDLY SAID THAT GLOBAL POWERS WERE TRYING TO KEEP INDIA AND PAKISTAN APART BY PROVIDING ARMS. WE ALSO CONTINUE TO HEAR FROM MEA THAT WE SHOULD PAY ATTENTION ONLY TO WHAT THE PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER SAY AND SHOULD BOTH NOT BE CONCERNED BY WHAT POLITICIANS SAY IN EITHER COUNTRY. WE SIMPLY DON'T KNOW FOR SURE WHETHER

THE GOI HAS TAKEN ANY POSITIVE ACTION TO QUIET DOWN ITS LEFTIST MINISTERS AND POLITICIANS, BUT THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE RECENT RHETORIC.

F) IN THE MORE FILMY AREA OF "ATTITUDE," WE PERCEIVE A GREATER SENSE OF RESPONSIVENESS IN OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH MEA OFFICIALS ON DAY-TO-DAY MATTERS. EVEN IF THIS DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT THE INDIANS ARE DOING MORE THINGS THAT WE WANT, AT LEAST
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THEY ARE OFFERING TO LOOK INTO PROBLEMS MORE PROMPTLY.

3. IF THIS IS STILL RATHER AMORPHOUS, IT DOES REPRESENT AN IMPROVEMENT FROM THE STATE OF AFFAIRS ONLY A FEW WEEKS AGO. THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN A POLITICAL DECISION TO BEGIN TO GET BACK ONTO A TRACK WHICH CAN LEAD BACK TO A MEETING BETWEEN THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THE SECRETARY THIS FALL AND, APPARENTLY TO "COOL" THE RHETORIC WITH THE US. PARLIAHONT IS OUT OF SESSION AND SOME OF THE PRESSURE IS OFF THE GOVT. TO RESPOND DAY-BY-DAY TO HOSTILE QUESTIONS. WE BELIEVE CHAVAN (WITH MRS. GANDHI'S CONCURRENCE) IS PREPARING THE WAY, ON A BASIS ACCEPTABLE TO THE GOI, FOR A RETURN TO FORWARD MOVEMENT IN INDO-US RELATIONS AND HIS VISIT TO THE US LATER IN THE YEAR. WHAT WE DON'T YET KNOW -- AS THE EVIDENCE IS STILL IMCOMPLETE -- IS WHETHER THIS BASIS WILL ALSO MEET OUR REQUIREMENTS.

4. THERE CONTINUE THE USUAL NUMBER OF MINES ALONG THE WAY, SOME OF WHICH THE INDIANS APPEAR TO BE LAYING THEMSELVES, WHICH COULD IMPEDE OR STOP THIS MOVEMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE G.K. REDDY ARTICLE MENTIONED IN PARA 3(D) ABOVE, REDDY CLAIMS THAT THE GOI EXPECTS THE US TO SUPPORT INDIAN AGAINST PAKISTAN IN THE CONTEST FOR A SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT AT THIS YEAR'S UNGA. "AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR INDIA'S ELECTION ... MAY BE ONE OF THE FIRST EXAMPLES OF NORMALIZATION" AND, SAYS REDDY, "AN INFORMAL ASSURANCE TO THIS EFFECT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ALREADY GIVEN DURING SOME ROUTINE EXCHANGES ON THE SUBJECT." THIS KIND OF ANTICIPATORY PRESS BUILDUP -- SIMILAR TO WHAT THE INDIANS GENERATED ON THE PROSPECTS FOR OUR RETENTION OF OUR ARMS EMBARGO AFTER THE SECRETARY'S VISIT LAST FALL -- COULD HAVE A DEPRESSING EFFECT ON OUR DIALOGUE LATER THIS YEAR. SIMILARLY, DESPITE PRESS SUGGESTIONS THAT CHAVAN IS PREPARED TO RECONCILE HIMSELF TO SOME LEVEL OF US ARMS SALES TO PAKISTAN, ONCE THESE SALES ACTUALLY BEGIN, THE POLITICAL REVERBERATIONS WILL ALMOST INEVITABLY BE FELT HERE. INDIAN COMMODITY ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM AND THE IMPACT OF THIS ON US PL-480 NEGOTIATIONS (PENDING SOME AMENDMENT OF THE CURRENT LEGISLATION) IS ANOTHER VISIBLE CLOUD ON THE HORIZON.

LN5. WE CONCLUDE THAT THE INDIANS HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE CERTAIN STEPS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS, BUT WE DON'T YET KNOW HOW FAR THEY WILL GO. SO LONG AS THE PUBLIC RHETORIC ABOUT THE US REMAINS

RESTRAINED, WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD QUIETLY RECIPROCATATE
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INDIAN INITIATIVES TO GET BACK TO WORKING LEVEL ACTIVITIES UNDER
THE SUBCOMMISSIONS. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO RESERVE JUDGEMENT ON
MORE IMPORTANT DECISIONS WHICH WE MUST MAKE ABOUT MAJOR INDO-US
ACTIVITIES IN THE FUTURE.
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